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Hickman (right) leads a human-resources seminar in Moscow: Détente California style

SOVIET UNION

Esalen's Hot-Tub Diplomacy

For two weeks, the residents of Mill Valley, Calif., had a new neighbor: a middle-aged economist who jogged daily along the tree-lined streets and took a local energy-awareness course. The visitor seemed right at home in laid-back Marin County, except that he was a Soviet doctrinaire—Georgi Skorov, the deputy director of Moscow's Institute of U.S.A. and Canada Studies. In Big Sur, another Russian stranger came to soak in the area's famous sulfur baths. He, too, was an apparatchik—Yuri Zamoshkin, director of ideology at Skorov's institute. Zamoshkin also took time to meet with Hollywood filmmakers and with Gov. Jerry Brown as part of a unique exercise in détente California style.

It has been called "hot-tub diplomacy." As most unofficial U.S.-Soviet contacts have waned in recent years, one back channel has survived: an unorthodox, informal exchange program developed under the auspices of the Esalen Institute, the Big Sur-based mecca of the human-potential movement. In the past decade a dozen Esalen enthusiasts have journeyed to the Soviet Union to compare notes on such topics as parapsychology and herbal medicine. Esalen leaders have also invited Soviet scientists and bureaucrats to California. So far the exchanges haven't done much to ease East-West tensions, but they have generated some good vibrations. "The word 'Esalen' is

magic to me," says Skorov. "It is a symbol of people who, like myself, understand the value of things other than material wealth."

The Esalen connection began in the early '70s when two of the institute's directors, Michael Murphy and Jim Hickman, began traveling to the Soviet Union. Then Hickman met Arthur Hartman, the diplomat who was soon to become U.S. ambassador to Moscow. Hartman's wife, Donna, was a close friend of Harriet Crosby, a onetime Esalen counselor. Hartman became interested in Esalen's activities, and after arriving in Moscow he worked be-

The faith healer and Schweickart: Herbs and 'magic'



hind the scenes to facilitate more visits.

The exchange network blossomed quickly. Crosby ventured into the Soviet outback in search of traditional healers. Former astronaut Rusty Schweickart, another Esalen convert, met with Dzhuna Davitashvili—the faith healer who reportedly treated Leonid Brezhnev—and held an earthbound rendezvous with Soviet cosmonauts. Eventually, Esalen began sponsoring trips to California for Soviet officials. During his visit, Skorov stayed with Murphy in Mill Valley. Now he praises Murphy as the "incarnation of a man of intelligence, strength and physical beauty."

Rock 'n' Roll: One particularly strange encounter took place last summer. Hickman asked the Soviets if he could broadcast a portion of California's US rock concert inside Russia—and in exchange beam a Soviet rock 'n' roll show back to America. The Soviets agreed. Three days later Hickman and his Soviet crew arrived at a Moscow broadcast station to find Soviet guards with machine guns posted at every gate. The Soviet musicians who showed up had received notice that cars would pick them up at midnight: some assumed they were about to be arrested. For an audience, Soviet authorities invited a select group of university students, most of whom had to be issued blue jeans for the event.

Not surprisingly, Esalen's activities have attracted suspicion. Some U.S. officials believe the Kremlin might have special uses for the human-potential movement. One theory is that Moscow is searching for methods to improve the productivity of Soviet workers; another is that the Kremlin would like to discover new techniques of behavior modification—or mind control. At the very least, Esalen gives the Soviets a welcome contact with the United States; Hickman and Murphy deny charges that they are operating a CIA or KGB front.

In fact, Esalen's relationship with the Russians seems more on the order of a friendly encounter group. "We've had very civilized dinners and shouted at one another about Afghanistan," says Esalen's George Leonard. "I've told them they are order freaks, and they admit it." Hickman says that he has received assurances that the exchanges will continue under the new Kremlin leadership. And for the moment, even some of the cynics see no harm in Esalen's sulfur-bath diplomacy. "If all 270 million Soviets and all 230 million Americans could sit together in a hot tub," says one U.S. official in Moscow, "the world would be in better shape." Or if Ronald Reagan and Yuri Andropov ever shared a hot soak, could a superpower thaw be far behind?

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